

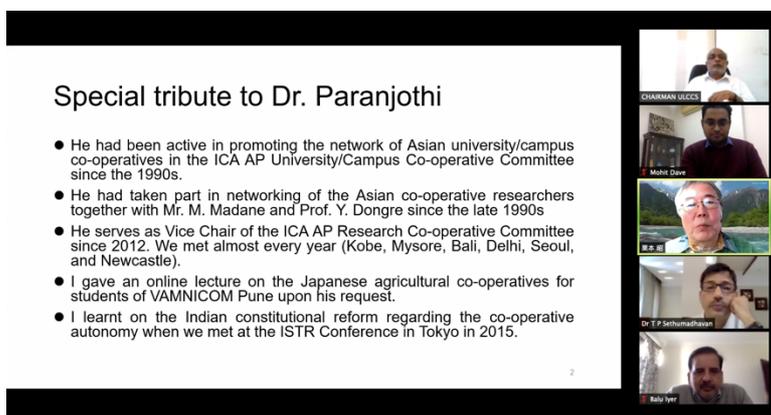
Report of the 15th ICA-AP Cooperative Research Conference held online on December 17-18, 2020

The ICA-AP Committee on Cooperative Research (CCR) organized the 15th ICA-AP Cooperative Research Conference online from December 17-18, 2020. The conference was organized with the support of Agricultural Cooperative Staff Training Institute (ACSTI), Government of Kerala, ICA Domus Trust, ICA-EU Partnership on Cooperatives in Development and the Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society (ULCCS) to bring together academics and researchers working on cooperatives in the Asia-Pacific region. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference used the online platform to showcase the presentation of papers and conduct relevant discussions.

The event was well-attended by around 80 individuals from 12 countries viz. Australia (4), Belgium (1), Ethiopia (1), various provinces of India (50), Indonesia (11), Iran (2), Japan (2), Malaysia (3), Nepal (2), Palestine (2), Spain (1) and Sri Lanka (1) comprising of researchers, policy makers, cooperative practitioners, young scholars and students, who shared their experiences on issues related to the conference theme, 'Addressing climate change through cooperative enterprise'. The conference format, with two Young Scholar/Early Career Researcher's workshops on Day 1 and three thematic research panels on Day 2 worked well with the participants.

Special tribute to Dr. Paranjothi

- He had been active in promoting the network of Asian university/campus co-operatives in the ICA AP University/Campus Co-operative Committee since the 1990s.
- He had taken part in networking of the Asian co-operative researchers together with Mr. M. Madane and Prof. Y. Dongre since the late 1990s
- He serves as Vice Chair of the ICA AP Research Co-operative Committee since 2012. We met almost every year (Kobe, Mysore, Bali, Delhi, Seoul, and Newcastle).
- I gave an online lecture on the Japanese agricultural co-operatives for students of VAMNICOM Pune upon his request.
- I learnt on the Indian constitutional reform regarding the co-operative autonomy when we met at the ISTR Conference in Tokyo in 2015.



The screenshot shows a video conference interface. On the left, a slide titled 'Special tribute to Dr. Paranjothi' contains a list of five bullet points detailing his contributions to the ICA-AP network and research. On the right, a vertical grid of five video thumbnails shows participants: 'CHAIRMAN ULCCS', 'Mohit Dave', 'Dr. T. P. Sethumadhavan', and 'Rishi Iyer'.

The conference commenced with Mr. Balasumramanian Iyer, Regional Director, ICA-AP welcoming the delegates in the opening ceremony. He expressed sincere gratitude to ICA-AP CCR for organizing the conference despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the unfortunate demise of the Conference Chairperson, Late Dr. Paranjothi. Prof. Akira Kurimoto, Chairperson of the ICA-AP CCR in his opening remarks narrated the background of the research committee and its importance, while also giving a special tribute to Dr. Paranjothi. Mr. Ramesan Paleri, Chaiman, ULCCS welcomed the participants and expressed his best wishes for the two-day conference.



Sri. Kadakampally Surendran, Minister for Cooperation, Tourism and Devaswoms, Government of Kerala appreciated the efforts of ICA-AP while inaugurating the conference and delivering the keynote address. He mentioned that the Government of Kerala is in the process of ensuring a sustainable, low-carbon path ecosystem in the state including Carbon neutral initiatives. Historically, cooperative societies in the state are playing a prominent role in the economic uplift of the people particularly the weaker and marginalised. As part of the Haritha Keralam mission of the state government, cooperatives are already in the forefront for developing organic agriculture, planting saplings, water conservation, promoting non-conventional energy and waste management. The minister released the book on 'Cooperatives and Social Innovation' edited by Dr. Rajasekhar and Dr. Manjula along with Late Dr. T. Paranjothi, aimed to empower cooperative researchers in getting insights of the successful cooperative models in Asia and the Pacific region.

Mr. Mohit Dave, Secretary of the ICA-AP CCR later introduced the participants to the conference theme and structure. He mentioned that there were 61 abstracts received for the conference; out of which 36 were shortlisted and called for presentation. Finally, 12 research papers around the theme of the conference will be presented at the conference in three sessions on Day 2 of the conference.

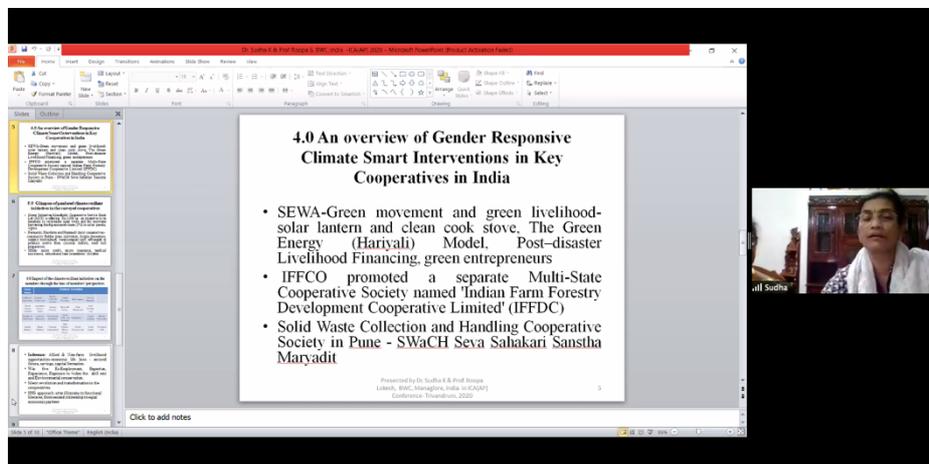


On the first day, two dedicated workshops were organized for young scholars and early career researchers in order to cultivate and enhance an interdisciplinary collaboration. The workshop gave an opportunity for these scholars to present their research in a friendly environment and be provided constructive feedback and support from senior academic researchers in the field. The first session was chaired by Dr. Y. Dongre, Associate Member of ICA-AP CCR. He highlighted where cooperative research is positioned now and touched upon some of the ongoing initiatives including the Asia Pacific Cooperative Research Partnership, originating in Bali in 2014.



The second session was led by Dr. Sidsel Grimstad, Member of ICA-AP CCR with the help of Dr. Emi Do, Agronomist and Cooperative Specialist (Japan), Mr. Garry Cronan, Cooperative Strategist and Policy Specialist (Australia) and Ms. Heira Hardiyanti, Lecturer (Indonesia). The session laid the vision for where we might be heading in cooperative research, by presenting a framework for publications for young scholars and listing key areas of research such as values and principles; cooperative governance and member participation; cooperative business models and social innovations in times of crisis; contribution to the SDGs, cooperative statistics etc. Mr. Sanjay Verma, Member of the ICA-AP CCR summarised the discussions and key findings of Day 1, along with sharing the offerings and incentives for young scholars from the National Cooperative Union of India.

Day 2 of the conference saw several presentations from leading academicians and researchers around the theme of climate action and cooperatives. The sessions were chaired by Prof. Ann Apps from the Newcastle Law School in Australia, Dr. H. K. Misra from IRMA in India, and Dr. C. Pitchai from Gandhigram Rural Institute in India. Several topics of academic interest were discussed and debated.



In the closing plenary, Dr. T. P. Sethumadhavan, Director, ULCCS thanked all the researchers for preparing the papers and presenting at the conference. He stressed upon the need to focus on strengthening regional research networks by making a presence in major research forums and connecting various related fields and research associations. Mr. Iyer in his closing remarks also mentioned about forming a young scholars' network and more importantly, carrying out collaborative research projects. He thanked the organisers for their continued support and engagement. The Dr. Mauritz Bonow Award, instituted in 2016 to recognize young researchers and to attract talent to look into issues relating to cooperatives was also announced by him. He mentioned that the endeavour of ICA Domus Trust and ICA-AP is to promote youth participation in not only the ICA-AP Research Conference but also other conferences to bring interest and attention to cooperatives.

A sub-committee of Dr. Sidsel Grimstad, Prof. Akira Kurimoto and Prof. Yashvanth Dongre looked into the papers which showcased academic rigour and critical analysis in writing and research methods. Mr. Abhishek Saxena, Research Fellow, Institute of Rural Management Anand, India was awarded the first prize of US\$ 500. He reviewed three case studies of cooperative enterprises/producer organizations promoted in regions susceptible to environmental degradation and/or trying to promote good agriculture practices. The paper looked at the challenges faced by these producer organizations while trying to stay viable and benefitting the members. Ms. Sreelaksmi C. C., Research Scholar, School of Management Studies, Cochin University of Science and Technology, India received the second prize of US\$ 300. Her study incorporated the environmental concern and green perceived value to understand the adoption and continuance of green banking and analyzed the role of trust & cooperation in the initial acceptance or confirmation of expectation process.